

LETTERS *to the Editor*

Spider Bites, Tick Bites

THE CASE REPORT of Doctors Lewis and Regan, *CALIFORNIA MEDICINE*, Vol. 105, p. 457, is of interest in that the photographs and clinical description accurately portray the results of the bite of the venomous tick known as the pajaroello, a rather unpleasant resident of California, in particular, the Salinas Valley.

The pajaroello, also spelled pajahuello and variously pronounced ("pock-a-whale-oh" is heard most frequently), encounters its victim in a rural field, one which appears quite pleasantly dotted with oak trees, and which has been grazed by cattle. The tick frequents the ground beneath the oak trees where the traveler is wont to take a rest from driving, or a short picnic. The bite of the pajaroella is not usually felt immediately, in common with many other ticks it apparently produces some local anesthesia before becoming firmly attached.

A severe local reaction begins a few hours later and progresses with startling speed from a small bite with perhaps 2 cm of induration to one with deep central cyanosis of 5 cm to 10 cm surrounded by thick, edematous skin within 24 or 36 hours, and later by a very distressing total slough of the cyanotic area. The sloughed area resembles that which would be cut out by a roughly wielded plug-cutter through all layers of the skin down to the fascia. Fever is uncommonly present, and despite the appearance of the lesion, pain is not prominent and there is little if any lymphangitis.

Treatment is not standardarized, however, local wound care is given consisting of a bland soapy wash, large doses of tetracycline commenced immediately, immobilization (if an extremity is involved), and warm moist packs of diluted sterile Magnesium Sulfate solution. Early treatment in

this manner has prevented slough in cases seen as long as six hours after presumed time of exposure.

The pajaroello does not appear like ordinary more familiar ticks in that it is rather small, about 0.6 cm in size, and instead of appearing somewhat leathery it resembles a shed piece of oak bark, grey in color and rough in texture. The underside resembles the more familiar ticks. Although Doctors Lewis and Regan stated that they were unfamiliar with insects which could cause injury similar to that in their case report and ascribed the injury to a variety of *Loxosceles*, the pajaroello is defined in Dorland's *Illustrated Medical Dictionary*, 24th Ed. as, "pajaroello: *Ornithodoros coriaceus*. The pajaroello of California which is greatly feared because of its bite. It is not known to transmit disease." Another dictionary describes it as "a venomous tick," and a desk standard dictionary gives an alternate spelling as "pajahuello," which closely resembles the local pronunciation.

In that no known vector of injury was identified in the above-described case, and knowing of the common existence of the pajaroello, it would be interesting to learn if the patient had been in an area where he could have picked up this very undesirable hitch-hiker and to collect some pajaroellas and see if they would produce lesions similar to those described.

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I HAVE REVIEWED Dr. Dooley's letter with great interest. According to Dr. Dooley the venomous tick pajaroello can cause necrotic lesions similar to but smaller than those produced by the *Loxosceles* spider.

This tick usually encounters its victims in rural fields and is commonly found in areas grazed by cattle, and in the vicinity of oak trees. Therefore, this tick would be classified mainly as an outdoor insect, and encounters its victims in open areas.